

## Called To Serve Isaiah 6: 1-8; Luke 5: 1-11

This morning's Scripture lessons both address calls to serve in God's kingdom- first of all, to Isaiah, the Prophet and then the call to Simon Peter, the Apostle. When I began work on this morning's message it was striking that of all Sundays- these Scriptures are the recommendations from the Lectionary for THIS Sunday. Even Psalm 138, which was used as our Call to Worship, speaks to being called and strengthened to serve. This morning, we acknowledged the call from God through this congregation to three of our members as leadership as Elders and a Deacon. We ordained two people and installed all three to serve with and for us on God's behalf in the upcoming years. This does seem like an ideal time to consider the calls in Scripture placed by God to Isaiah and Simon Peter. Both these calls from Scripture give strong testimony to the acknowledgement by God- in Isaiah and Jesus- in Luke, of the importance of those who- even though they may feel unqualified to serve- are indeed found called to bring God's word to the world.

The verses of Isaiah 6 are one of the more familiar portions of the Book of Isaiah, primarily because of Isaiah's response to the vision he experiences- the word's, "Here am I; send me!" have been a challenge for many over the years- even being put to music, as we shall sing for our closing hymn.

There is much debate over whether chapter 6 represents Isaiah's original call as a prophet or if it was a part of a memoir that was inserted into the Book of Isaiah. The account has features of a prophetic call: the divine vision, the call, reluctance or refusal on the part of the prophet, and a sign from God followed by a commission. We will see these same four features in Jesus' call to Simon Peter a bit later.

Isaiah's temple vision shows the glory of a God who is too big to fit this world; the mere hem of God's robe fills the temple completely as found in verse 1. God is enthroned as a king, and surrounded by royal attendants- the seraphim singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" found in verse 3. Isaiah, understandably fearful, recognizes his lips are unclean- or "common" as opposed to "holy." Rather than being fit to speak of the divine God, his lips are capable only of human speech. Isaiah acknowledges that he shares, with his people, this commonness of speech that cannot do justice to the God before him. His "woe is me!" is a lament for himself and his fellow citizens. Fortunately, God has a treatment for his condition, the searing of his lips by a live coal from the altar. Isaiah's common, human lips have then been set apart to speak as God has called him. If we continue through the Book of Isaiah, we find that God has called him to spend his life warning the people of the trials and tribulations to come- realities brought on themselves by their behavior and unwillingness to change their ways. Many a person called by God for service in God's kingdom has felt the struggle Isaiah experienced in his life- the struggle to be heard or at least to see positive results of being heard.

Then the call to Simon Peter- we find it follows the Old Testament call pattern- the vision/reality, the call, reluctance, sign/commission. First of all- the realization of reality. This is shown when Jesus, finding himself with a problem of the crowd of people following him- verses 1-3 state- people were pressing close to hear the word of God. Jesus saw two boats on the shore, just in from an unsuccessful night's work of fishing. Jesus gets into the boat belonging to Simon Peter and then asks Peter to put the boat a little way from shore. Peter is drawn into Jesus' reality as he stops the task of washing the nets from the evening's work and does as Jesus asks.

When Jesus finishes speaking, he extends a call and instructs Simon Peter to go out into the deep water and put down the nets. Peter's reaction is to object and state the futility of putting the nets into the water after working all night and catching nothing. Peter, is reluctant but in spite of his belief that it would be useless, he puts the nets out to the deep on the basis of nothing but a word. He says, "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." Simon Peter puts his trust in Jesus' word. The resulting catch is true of Luke's theme of reversal: what humans expect and what God delivers could not be more different. The catch of fish was so great that even with two boats they were in danger of sinking from the weight of all the fish.

Peter's response to this happening is much like Isaiah's cry of woe. Peter says, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For the task Jesus has in mind, Peter's self-proclaimed weakness is actually a strength. Jesus wants humans to minister to humans, sinners to minister to sinners. Jesus' reassurance to Peter- "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." bears a resemblance to Isaiah's lips being cleansed by the live coal. Peter's conclusion or response was to leave everything and follow Jesus. In contrast to Simon Peter's former life of persecuting the followers of Jesus, Peter would play a significant part in the life and growth of the early church continuing to present time and this church in which we continue to share the word of God.

Our Isaiah passage is an account of Isaiah's call to be a prophet, a call in which he had a vision of his own sinfulness, but responds, "Here am I, send me." When Peter sees the unexpected catch of fish, he confesses himself a sinner in the presence of Jesus and when called, leaves everything and follows Jesus. These reactions to the presence of a call from God/Jesus link our Old Testament and the Gospel scriptures today- both deal with calls to serve- calls to bring the message of God to all people.

Fishing for people is common both in the church and out. In the church it is called evangelism; outside the church it is electioneering. It is fascinating to watch how political hopefuls go about their work fishing for people. In the pre-election period (if there is such)- electioneering

is called, "taking a stand on an issue." But watch as the wrappings are removed once the political fishing season officially opens. Each candidate throws a net into the sea of people, hoping for a catch large enough to secure victory. Political signs sprout like daffodils in the Spring. Full-page ads in local papers point out why a particular candidate is really the only option for the thinking voter. Millions of dollars are spent during each campaign to win voters' allegiance. Electioneering goes on and on, often bringing a tiredness and a negative feeling for many. In spite of that tiredness, is it not successful at least to some degree?

What about within the church? We call it evangelism- a word, for which we often feel the need to find other words, because of the negative image evangelism brings. The dictionary defines evangelism as, "the winning or revival of a personal commitment to Christ." That seems like it could be a wonderful, positive, life changing experience. So why is it often seen as negative? Might it be in HOW we have done evangelism- the "in your face- you need to change your ways" method- but where is Christ in that? Jesus said Peter would fish for people and then proceeded to show him and the other followers what that meant. They ministered to those who needed help and healing, they showed through word and action an image of humbleness and love. And wonder of wonders, this same model continues to change lives in a positive way today, and with God's guidance and blessing on into the future.

As we are called by God,- and by the way, the call to serve is NOT just for those we ordain and install as Elders and Deacons. Granted they are given specific responsibilities for a period of time, but the call to serve comes to each of us in a variety of ways. At times, our younger members open the front door and greet us when we come to church. They help light the candles, turn off lights and put up the screen. The young people in our Confirmation Class are reminded often that there are service opportunities available and expected of them, now, but especially once they are voting members of the congregation. As you may notice- our Confirmation Class is already taking that seriously as they help with the technology each Sunday.

A few thoughts as we, of all ages, are called to serve:

\*It is easy to feel the frustration of the disciple's long night of fishing with no results. We may feel our efforts in response to being called to serve often appear to make no difference so we are tempted to give up. Like the disciples we are called to try again. Reading this account also found in the Gospel of John- Chapter 21- we find Jesus telling the disciples to cast the nets on the right side of the boats. It is my understanding that the usual way was to cast the nets on the left side. Does this not remind us to try something different at times rather than give up?

\*Effective fishing for people requires that we have a personal experience with Christ- a relationship that nourishes our faith and enables us to move forward as we are called- not questioning or letting busy schedules or personal concerns take priority. If the disciples had ignored Christ's instructions, they would have missed nets filled to overflowing.

\*Success for the disciples also meant a joint effort- all hands and skills were necessary- no single person could accomplish pulling in those nets full of fish before the nets broke. There may be some folks for whom we designate specific responsibilities. But they are helpless and soon become discouraged if other hands and hearts do not help carry the load.

\*Effective fishing requires that our goal be clearly before us- that of sharing the love of God with all people- not just those that fit our image or we could put to work sharing the tasks we undertake.

\*Our world today is full of people of all ages rushing from one thing to another all the while looking for peace and security- an unending "sea of fish" available for sharing the peace that only God can give.

A group of children were playing hide and seek one day. When it was a certain little boy's turn to hide, he hid so well that the others could not find him. After a while, the other children just gave up and wandered down the street and started playing another game. Finally, when it was starting to get dark, the little boy realized that his friends weren't looking for him anymore. So, he marched down the street in tears and said, "You were supposed to keep looking. It's not over until you find me!"

We are called to serve in God's kingdom and for the furtherance of that kingdom. It's not over until you/we find all those that might be hidden and in tears. Amen

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